

CENTRAL

Keeping it Rural, and Loving It

By Julie Hall

At first glance, most people might not think there is much to Central Utah. In fact, some may see it as taking a step back in time. The pace is a little slower, the people a little friendlier, and the scenic views a little more visible. But, upon taking a closer look you will find that the six counties that make up this region—Sevier, Juab, Millard, Sanpete, Piute, and Wayne—are bustling with activity and have a great deal to offer residents and visitors alike. Each community has maintained that small-town feel and strong tradition of history, while offering new-comers a multitude of possibilities waiting to be discovered.

According to the Governor's Office of Economic Development, most rural counties in Utah are doing well, some very well, but a few could still benefit from some major business investment. In terms of growth and strength, rural economies are currently not that different from urban economies, according to Les Prall, a member of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, Rural Division. These robust business climates come from the land—in the form of agriculture, mining, and livestock—from savvy entrepreneurs setting up small successful businesses, and from tourism.

COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT

The Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED) has a vast number of successful programs in place to help communities strengthen their economic ties. Many rural counties have benefited greatly from these programs. One such program is the Pioneer Communities/ Main Street Program. Through the program, communities work to restore the physical and economic vitality of their downtown business districts. The initiative focuses on the make up of the community's main street in hopes of creating greater economic stability.

Richfield and Mount Pleasant are two communities in Central Utah that successfully participated in the program. They received consulting, counseling, training, strategic help as well as state funding to make their main street areas prosper. The idea was to help draw new visitors to the area and create

FAST FACTS:

Counties: Juab, Millard, Sevier, Sanpete, Piute, Wayne

Major Cities: Richfield (7,044), Nephi (5,045), Ephraim (4,977), Delta (3,106), Loa (498), Circleville (476)

Regional Civilian Labor Force: 34,952

Per Capita Income: \$19,550 (Juab), \$22,153 (Millard), \$19,695 (Sevier), \$16,978 (Sanpete), \$20,976 (Piute), \$20,985 (Wayne)

Major Employers: Aspen Achievement Academy, Brown Brothers Construction, Dalton Brothers Trucking, State of Utah, Butch Cassidy's Hideout, Snow College, Moroni Feed, Canyon Fuels Company, Federal Government, US Gypsum, Great Lake Cheese of Utah, Continental Lime, Nephi Rubber Products, Quality Craft Wood Works

Average Price of Homes, Year End 2006:

Central Utah-\$122,138; Juab-\$162,584



growth in their retail sectors.

GOED is now evaluating programs that are more broadly community-based. "We would like to move in a direction where the focus is not just on the community's main street, but the community as a whole," says Prall. He maintains that more areas can participate and build economic strength if the focus is placed on the community as a whole. "We want to be community driven, to help with what the community specifically needs and wants."

SUM OF THE PARTS

Though small by some measures, each county in Central Utah adds to the collective economic growth of the region. "Central Utah is made up of several small pieces that come together to push the economy up. All these parts help make the economy more stable," says Prall. This strength can come from small and larger employers alike. For example, a handful of employers in the region employ a large portion of the population. On the other hand, Richfield has a regional shopping center, includ-

ing big box retailers like Home Depot, which provide a large number of jobs, while in Sevier County, Salina City has a 400-acre industrial park which is recruiting manufacturing and distribution companies.

What is drawing all of this activity to rural Utah settings? County directors of economic development often mention that new businesses come to the area because of the rural lifestyle and the quality of life it provides—including a business friendly environment. Business success comes when entrepreneurs who are not afraid to take chances move to the area and are able to provide needed services—services that are often unique to the area.

Aspen Ranch, a licensed adolescent residential treatment center for troubled teens located in Wayne County, is the largest employer in the county, with more than 100 people on the payroll. This private boarding school is surrounded by green mountains and red rock desert offering an alternative type of schooling that is highly effective in dealing with its specialized clientele.

ENERGY MARKET

Central Utah is becoming a strong energy-producing region due to its abundance of coal and gas to fire power plants, and the recent discovery of potentially vast oil reserves. These energy resources provide significant strength to the economies of several rural counties.

The Intermountain Power Project (IPP) in Millard County is the largest power plant in Utah. Plans for the coal-burning plant near Delta began back in the 1970s. Today, Southern California buys much of the electricity generated by the IPP. The company has future plans for increased production that are in discussion which could increase its capacity significantly.

In Juab County, the Currant Creek power plant recently completed the second phase of its building plan. The plant first began generating electricity in 2005. Today, this \$350 million natural gas-fired plant is capable of generating 525 megawatts of electricity—enough power for nearly 270,000 homes. Owned by PacifiCorp, the Currant Creek power plant doubled in size and increased its efficiency with the completion of this second phase.

Sevier County is in talks with a Utah-based company proposing to build a 270 megawatt coal-fired power plant. The power plant would be worth \$600 million and could create close to 300 jobs for the area. If the proposal is approved and goes on-line, the power plant would become

operational between 2012 and 2015.

A significant discovery of oil was initially made in Sevier County in 2003, with a formal announcement in the spring of 2005. The Wolverine Gas & Oil Corp. of Michigan made the discovery after years of searching the area. Several other oil companies have returned to Central Utah to acquire their own wells in the area. Some estimates predict the area could contain 100 million to 200 million barrels of oil, making this the biggest onshore discovery in the past 30 years.

GROWING TOURISM

Outdoor recreation brings tourists from all over the world to Central Utah. From boating, fishing, and water skiing to sand dunes and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails to snowmobiling and rock climbing, there is an endless supply of outdoor adventure to be discovered in this region's varied terrain of rugged canyons, deserts, lakes, and soaring mountain peaks.

The Paiute ATV Trail brings numerous tourists to the area with its 272-mile loop course that crosses mountain ranges, rugged canyons and deserts running through several counties in south-central Utah. It is called the trail with no beginning or end—riders can enter from any point along the route. Mountain bikers are also welcome.

Travelers to the region will also notice the close proximity of Sevier and Piute counties to several



PAIUTE ATV TRAIL

world-renowned national parks in the area, including Bryce Canyon, Zion, Arches, Canyonlands, Great Basin, Capitol Reef, and the Grand Canyon North Rim.

Outdoor sports aren't limited to the summer months in Central Utah, but keep visitors coming to the area year round. Sanpete County is becoming known as one of the best places to snow kite, a new sport that's quickly gaining in popularity.

In addition to the region's panoramic scenery and breathtaking views, people come to learn about the area's rich history. Historical preservation takes place in all of the counties. Heritage Highway 89 takes travelers through four Central Utah counties: Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, and Wayne. Along the way people can stop and visit various shops and studios where heritage artisans have their work displayed.

Millard County is partnering to build another historical route, the Great Basin Heritage Route. The route leads through Millard County into White Pine County, Nevada and celebrates the Fremont, Shoshone, Utah and Paiute Indians, explorers, trappers, miners, farmers and ranchers who traveled through the area.

Whether for business or for pleasure—or ideally, a little of both—Central Utah offers a wealth of resources to meet nearly any need. From hidden treasures in the scenic views, historic preservation or extreme sports to abundant energy, pro-business programs or well-educated, productive employees, these rural gems are not to be overlooked.

Some estimates predict Central Utah could contain 100 million to 200 million barrels of oil, making this the biggest onshore discovery in the past 30 years.



CURRENT CREEK POWER PLANT